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Does the good end justify all means? Critical remarks on the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325

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Fifteen years after the decision on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS), a [Global Study](#) was launched this September to reflect upon its impact and to discuss ways of further improving and developing the WPS agenda. Although the Global Study was unanimously welcomed in the circles of advocates and activists around UNSCR 1325, a careful reading leads to a more cautious approach. Here, I argue that several unexpectedly weird statements, assessments and approaches could prevent the Global Study from developing into more than the almost usual 'preaching to the convert', a fate that unfortunately is met by many disseminations and outputs in the wider context of UNSCR 1325. I suggest, however, that these problems are rooted in a general problem around the WPS agenda.

The general trend the Global Study follows is to take the WPS agenda back to the political mainstream. In these unfortunate times, one obvious mechanism for doing this was to create the link to the international counter-terrorism agenda. Hence, the Global Study calls for special attention of women's issues when countering terrorist threats, and particularly asks to 'build the capacity of women and girls, including mothers, female community and religious leaders, and women's civil society groups to engage in efforts to counter violent extremism' (p. 231). This effort is underlined by three articles (11-13) in the recent UNSCR 2242 on the state of play regarding UNSCR 1325 dedicated to terrorism.

This strategy seems way beyond the initial entry points of the WPS agenda, as one of its main cornerstones – peace – tends to vanish from the efforts given a situation where an increasingly martial war rhetoric has become the new standard of elite politics in discursively dealing with terrorist threats. Another perhaps logical, but still troublesome recommendation emphasises this trend – the call for an increasing recruitment of women into standing armies (p. 156). While such a call might support the fulfilling of gender targets in UN missions, it is hardly a proper request for activists of the wider agenda for peace – especially if challenges such as the worldwide overspending on arms – is not tackled at all.

At times, the normative effort even overrides serious ontological concerns. The appraisal on the International Criminal Court, for example, develops to a point of acclaiming the crafting of societal structures by the means of criminal law. 'In recent years, a number of States Parties to the Rome Statute have amended their penal codes to criminalize a broad range of gender-based violations in line with their obligations to domesticate the Statute. [...] This suggests a possible cascade effect of international norms being translated and applied to the domestic sphere' (p. 105). While every critical and socially aware criminal lawyer would caution against criminal law as a means for designing socially accepted behaviour, the Global Study, overwhelmed by the opportunities created by the new global force ICC, argues for the exact opposite. The strong rejection of legal pluralism as being unhelpful for women and girls (p. 119) follows this radical modernist – if not potentially authoritarian – line of thinking.

The most problematic aspect of the Global Study, however, is the often inappropriate way of using research, in particular via the almost strategic mix-up between correlation and causality. Several examples illustrate: 'Growing evidence-based research is showing that states that have higher levels

of gender equality (political, social and economic) are less likely to resort to the use of force in relation to engagement with other states' (p. 206). The study discusses this correlation as proof of the need of integrating women in the higher ranks of decision making. While this is a laudable and necessary goal, to construct a causality out of the correlation of a lower likeliness of using force and higher gender equality ignores the complexity of the link in the effort to construct a teleological argument. The same can be said about a similar claim made about the proneness to extremism: 'Recent research from many think tanks, highlighted in the journal Foreign Policy, has increasingly shown that there is a correlation between women's rights and a decrease in violent extremism. Those countries with relative gender equality are less prone to violent extremism' (p. 227).

This strategy of mixing up correlations with causalities becomes even more problematic if a causality seems to be logical – but has not really been proved: 'A clear correlation has been established between more open models of negotiations and a higher likelihood that the outcome agreements will hold and prevent a relapse into conflict. Specifically, peace agreements are 64 per cent less likely to fail when civil society representatives participate' (p. 42). Besides the simple problem that the number of relevant cases is just too small to reasonably come up with an authoritative number like '64%', the problem of which comes first remains: does civil society integration indeed produce the 'better' agreements? Or again, are there more complicated reasons for the link? Had the state of conflict is developed in a way that a settlement already had taken place informally, hence a broader participation in peace talks was not seen as a problem by the conflicting parties? Or are conflicts in which there is a very active civil society in some way 'easier' to resolve, than mass scale violence where civil society itself may be decimated and destroyed? These are without doubt important questions to investigate, and with high relevance to any peacebuilding efforts. To take a civil society-inclusion equals better peace agreements-causality as a given, however, complicates rather than assists, since it transfers complex research problems into a non-challengeable dogma.

The 15 years since UNSCR 1325 and the 'Global Study' show that the WPS agenda has arrived at a watershed. Will it develop further in the direction of providing clear-cut solutions based on arguing that it just needs a harder push to finally reach them? Or will the agenda engage with conceptual challenges and tackle the complex, and in parts even contradictory relationship between its three cornerstones of women, peace and security? All serious research done on the interrelations between these three cornerstones shows that they are *not* necessarily mutually reinforcing, and have by no means a linear, mono-causal relationship.

In conclusion I suggest that an open, self-reflexive way of dealing with these challenging interrelations is the necessary way forward. The paradox the WPS agenda currently has to face is that the more easy, the more clear-cut the provided answers, the more the agenda turns into a public relations exercise that hardly attracts audiences beyond the circles of 'usual suspects' – the activists, proponents and the bureaucrats who have to listen anyway. The WPS agenda needs to be taken seriously, but for that to happen a document like the 'Global Study' needs to seriously tackle the existing challenges as well. Instead of giving superficial or even problematic 'evidence', it is necessary to engage with the existing conceptual challenges and ambiguities in the relationship between gender, peace and security. Despite obviously existing fears, this would doubtlessly strengthen the cause.

By [Dr Jan Pospisil](#)